AFTER THE ELECTION

II. THE DECLINE OF SECTIONALISM

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SECTIONALISM is passing as a great factor in the making of America. This passing was registered more pointedly than ever by the presidential election of 1928. Hoover's score of millions of votes were fairly evenly distributed over the United States in proportion to the distribution of population. So were Smith's millions. Both candidates got in almost constant proportion city votes and rural votes, Eastern votes and Western votes, Northern votes and Southern votes. Both got large votes in both home states, divided geographically by a continent. With the exception of the Smith states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, there was scarcely a state where the trailing candidate failed to get thirty per cent. of the popular vote. Hence the widespread distribution of the margin of majority, the widespread diffusion of victory, and the landslide in the electoral college. We might as well accustom ourselves to landslides in the electoral college, for such occurrences are very likely to become more frequent in the future.

This trend is due fundamentally neither to Al Smith nor the Herbert Hoover, neither to the blunders of the Donkey nor to the wisdom of the Elephant, however much it may have been accentuated by special human circumstances of the recent campaign. It is due in a high degree to the disappearance about a generation ago of the frontier as a vital factor in American development. The American frontier differentiated the new country from the old, the West from the East, and produced a mighty sectionalism. But the frontier, with frontier life and frontier conditions, has disappeared, and sectionalism is now following its producing factor into oblivion.

Emerson in the 'forties, E. L. Godkin in the 'sixties, and James Bryce in the 'eighties saw how the frontier differentiated the West from the East or America from Europe. The most comprehensive interpretation of this point, however, was given by Professor Frederick Jackson Turner, who in 1893 read to the American Historical Association his paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," and later wrote in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* on the contributions of the West to democracy. He found in the disappearance of the frontier about 1890 the close of the first great chapter of American history.

The Turner thesis of the meaning of the receding frontier and of the passing of frontier life was significantly illustrated by the Bryan movement with its climax in 1896. This great "battle of the standards" was also the final great battle of the sections. The coalition between the frontier West and the agrarian South did not avail to put the Nebraskan in the White House, for the simple reason that this West was too small. The great Middle West had become like the East in social and economic outlook, even in its agriculture, thanks to dairying and livestock raising. The Bryan West had receded far from the Jeffersonian West or the Jacksonian West, and the great clashing of the sections was to come never again.

If Wilson's coming to power is pointed to, it must be remembered that this resulted from a combined Wilson-Roosevelt appeal, the former President making it possible for the Democrat to carry important strongholds in the East and Middle West. A liberal victory, it was not sectional but national. La Follette's Progressive vote in 1924 was proportionately much less agrarian and trans-Mississippian than was Weaver's Populist vote in 1892; and O. G. Villard, surveying the campaign of 1924, discovered that the West had become conservatively and capitalistically sophisticated.

And now Smith's farm-relief appeal and his hydro-electric power issue, with Norris's support, have failed to win the West in this year of emphasis on prosperity. The West has its millionaires, its multimillionaires, its super-millionaires, who do not want to upset the apple cart or even jolt it. It was noticed, for instance, on Smith's Western trip, that children in the wealthier sections greeted his parade with shouts for Hoover. How difficult it has become to point out the "Wall-Street side of the Alleghenies"!

The South, too, is shifting from a sharp sectionalism with the passing of frontier conditions in the up-country, the end of planter dominance, and the diffusion of the negro and the negro problem through the nation. With its counting-houses and its smokestacks, the South now has its millionaires, even its multimillionaires, and its conservatives who see as one with their socio-economic kinsmen of the East. The protective tariff has its strong advocates in the South: the Birmingham *News* is an example of an influential daily urging that changing interests dictate a change from the traditional Southern attitude on this issue. The *Manufacturers' Record,* ardent champion of economic conservatism and Southern industrial progress, found itself fighting for the election of Hoover. The Republican nominee captured the industrial districts of the New South, such as those of Houston, Birmingham, Richmond, and Chattanooga. To Smith were left those charming centers of Old-South life and politics, New Orleans, Mobile, Charleston, and Montgomery, centers with an epicurean whiff of European civilization and not yet entirely convinced by the economic-efficiency argument for prohibition. The Old South is yielding to the New, and, though the Hoover gains will not be maintained in full, the *status quo ante* will never be restored.

If the election was won by prohibition, Protestantism, and prosperity, the greatest of these was prosperity, with hundreds of thousands of unemployed not voting. Pros-

perity was even much of the argument, by association, for the other issues, particularly for prohibition. Material prosperity was rather well distributed geographically and sufficiently diffused among the population to give the "in's" the verdict. The result was a victory vote as national in scope as the social philosophy and the paid circulation of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

We are passing from the cleavage of sections to the cleavage of classes, and attempts at coalitions of sections are to yield to attempts at coalitions of classes. These class lines will become more pronounced on occasions when prosperity seems less evident and more restricted. The Republican party is entering this new chapter of American evolution with an approximate monopoly of the Tory stratum, and the Donkey might be well advised to quit trying to climb the Gibraltar of Conservatism, which the Elephant has pre-empted for his own complacent carcass. Liberalism, radicalism, and even socialism are almost certain to receive greater attention in the future; and some party is going to profit by the slowly but surely rising tide of social politics.

This broadening of the conception and content of politics and this development of issues on national class lines are consequences of the rather uniform industrializing tendencies sweeping over the country after the end of the westward movement to free lands and cheap lands. Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote in 1857 that the test of American institutions, the choice between civilization and liberty as he saw it, would come when there should no longer be "a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land" to favor "Jeffersonian politics". James Bryce in *The American Commonwealth* saw with a nearer viewpoint the disappearance of the frontier and of free lands as ushering in a uniformity of civilization and "a time of trial for democratic institutions". With sectional lines no longer strong enough to conceal or neutralize class lines,

the testing of those prophecies is upon us. And, in this testing, the city must supplant the West as the hope of democracy, with the proletarian assuming the role of the frontiersman. Now that the old frontiersman is enshrined in literature, we may look for this new proletarian pressure on Congress and government, not yet and maybe not soon, but eventually and inevitably.